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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VIENNA 001173

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR KS AU
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE WISNER BRIEFS AUSTRIAN POLITICAL DIRECTOR

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Scott F. Kilner. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador Frank Wisner, the U.S. Kosovo Special Representative, discussed Kosovo status issues on April 21 with Austrian MFA Political Director Thomas Mayr-Harting. Wisner bluntly outlined the problem: Belgrade has decided to ignore private messages that the outcome of the status process will be Kosovo independence, and has instead chosen to block progress in the negotiations on practical issues. However, Wisner said he believed that, while Belgrade would object strongly to Kosovo independence as a fait accompli, Belgrade would accept this outcome in the end. Mayr-Harting agreed with Wisner's assessment. To Mayr-Harting's proposition that Russia's reaction would depend on Serbia's level of objection, Wisner said Russia would be more concerned with what else it could "trade" for Kosovo and with the degree of U.S.-European unity on the issue. Mayr-Harting said Austrian Chancellor Schuessel could use his good relations with Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica to deliver a message. Wisner said the time may not yet be ripe for this, but said the core message would be that the international community can help the Serbs, if the Serbs let them. Although Mayr-Harting expressed understanding with Wisner's decription of the core of the problem, he did not offer suggestions for addressing the problem. End Summary.

UN Seat

¶2. (C) Mayr-Harting referred to reports that Under Secretary Nicholas Burns had said explicitly at the April 20 G-8 political directors meeting in Moscow, that an independent Kosovo should have a UN seat. Wisner responded that U/S Burns's comments were nothing new. He added that they had come only in response to a German statement making a "preemptive concession" to a possible Serbian objections. It makes no sense to make such a concession now, particularly without any idea whether such a move would bring Belgrade closer to accepting eventual independence.

Assessment of Belgrade Views

¶3. (C) The core problem, Wisner said, was with Belgrade. Wisner said there was a real problem in that Belgrade does

not want to agree to Kosovo independence, but the international community has started a process which will end with Kosovo independence. In effect, Serbia is seeking to reopen what was decided in 1999.

¶4. (C) Wisner said he had told Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica that if he sought to create sovereign cut-outs of authority in Kosovo, rigid separation between Kosovar Serbs and the Pristina government, and crippling limitations on Kosovo's international status, he had our opposition. If, however, he sought reasonable accommodations for the Serbian miniority in Kosovo and assurances of the protection of Serbian religious and cultural sites in Kosovo, we could deal with him. Wisner said he told Kostunica that his tactics seemed like the former. The refusal to allow Kosovar Serbs to participate in Kosovar governing structures and the move to cut their salaries, the blockage of Serbian Orthodox Church participation in efforts at accommodation, and the unwillingness to deal seriously with attempts to negotiate practical arrangements indicated that Serbia was not prepared to make the choice of looking forward and confirming its future in the West.

¶5. (C) Wisner said we needed to draw the appropriate conclusions ourselves. Belgrade had made its mind up, and there was no pressure coming from within Belgrade to achieve a reasonable compromise that would defend Serb minority interests while recognizing Kosovo independence.

¶6. (C) The foregoing, Wisner said, were his conclusions on the basis of direct observation. The next element was an assumption he was making in light of his understanding of the situation. The assumption was that if the international community presented Belgrade with a decision that recognized

Kosovo independence, Belgrade would "go wild," but would ultimately accept the outome.

¶7. (C) Mayr-Harting agreed that Belgrade would "shout" about Kosovo independence, but would accept it in the end. The Serbians had a long history of "celebrating their defeats," Mayr-Harting said. That said, some issues, such as Kosovar UN membership, might be too much for Serbia to accept. Wisner reiterated that there is no need to address the issue of UN membership yet. Everything would depend on the final package, and we were not yet at that point.

Russian Reaction

¶8. (C) Mayr-Harting said the Russian reaction to Kosovo independence would be important, and the Russian reaction would depend on "the volume of Serbia's scream" about independence. Wisner demurred: the Russian reaction would remain unknown until the issue got to the UN Security Council, he thought. At that point, the Russian reaction would depend on what else was happening in the world -- the Russians would not hesitate to "trade" Kosovo for some other issue. The Russian reaction would also depend on how united the U.S. and Europe were. It was therefore important for the U.S. and Europe to continue to speak with one voice on Kosovo. Wisner said the Serbian reaction would be only a tertiary consideration in Russia's reaction.

Austrian Contacts with Kostunica

¶9. (C) Mayr-Harting said Deputy UN Special Negotiator for Kosovo Albert Rohan had been the architect of Austria's new relations with Kostunica's Serbia. There were good relations between Vienna and Belgrade, he said. Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel had a solid relationship with Kostunica -- the two were in the same European People's Party grouping --

and if we needed it, Schuessel could help with Kostunica.

¶10. (C) Wisner said Schuessel should probably "keep his powder dry" for the moment. However, the core message for Kostunica would be that the international community was there to help the Serbs, if they wanted to help themselves, but they had to give us something to work with.

¶11. (C) Mayr-Harting asked about the status of efforts to arrest Ratko Mladic, noting indications that the Serbs were going to deliver him to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) at the end of April. Wisner said these still seemed to be the indications. However, Wisner expressed concern that the Serbs would try to link Mladic's arrest and transfer to the Kosovo talks. Mayr-Harting agreed that this was a concern, and said the link should be between Mladic's arrest and Serbia's EU aspirations.

¶12. (C) Mayr-Harting asked whether the Montenegran independence referendum would have a bearing on Serbia's willingness to move forward on Kosovo. Wisner said he thought Montenegro was not material, because Serbia had already accepted the fact that Montenegro was going away. Mayr-Harting agreed, commenting that a pro-independence vote between 50 and 55 percent (the latter being the agreed threshhold for winning) would complicate matters.

¶13. (C) On religious institutions, Wisner noted that there was an appropriate focus on monasteries, but there was a continuing question of whether they came under national or church sovereignty. Wisner said Belgrade had barred the Serbian Orthodox Church from engaging directly on the issue, preventing practical discussions. Mayr-Harting said Austria had brought the communities together in conferences over the past several years.

Comment

¶14. (C) Mayr-Harting understood and agreed with Wisner's

description of the core of the problem with Belgrade, and of the reasons for it. However, he would not offer a suggestion on how to address it. Mayr-Harting's suggestion that Chancellor Schuessel engage with PM Kostunica reflects an Austrian faith in the power of personal diplomacy to win practical agreement on sticky issues. However, the Austrian approach would depend on a Serbian assessment that an EU future is Serbia's primary interest, and that a pragmatic resolution of Kosovo status will make Serbia's EU future possible.
McCaw